

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control
Immunization Program

Respiratory Virus Testing Instructions

Swab specimens should only be collected on patients who meet the following criteria:

Acute onset of influenza-like illness within the previous **48 hours** with symptoms of **fever** ($\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ [37.8°C]), and a **cough** or **sore throat**. Fever does not have to be present at the time of specimen collection.

Collection and Transport of Swab Specimens

Composition of Transport Medium: Culture transport medium is composed of 3cc buffered saline, 1% gelatin, 400 units of penicillin, and 200 micrograms of streptomycin.

Storage: The culture transport medium should **arrive frozen**. The medium should be **stored frozen** until ready for use. Thawed medium should be **refrigerated** immediately and **used within two weeks**. Thawed medium should **not** be **re-frozen**. Please note: The ice pack in the outer mailing tube should be stored in the freezer in the outer mailing tube to be used for transportation of specimens to the SLI.

Collection of Specimen: Influenza, Para-Influenza and Adenovirus can be isolated from either Nasopharyngeal (NP) or throat swab. If you wish to test for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), an NP swab must be used, as testing for RSV cannot be performed on a throat swab. *Please use only one swab- note that the NP swab is preferred, if possible.* Thaw transport medium under tap water and let stand in ice water until specimen has been collected as described below.

- Throat swab: Vigorously swab the surface of the patient's posterior pharynx with a sterile swab.
- NP swab: See back of page for instructions.

Immediately place the swab into the tube containing cold virus transport medium and tightly close the cap. After the specimen has been obtained, medium should be **refrigerated**, and **not re-frozen**, until it is to be transported to the SLI *as soon as possible* (as described below). **Every attempt should be made to transport specimens within 24 hours of collection . Specimens received more than 3 days after collection will be deemed unsuitable for testing.**

Transport: The specimen should be placed into the aluminum container (provided) and capped. Fill in **all** the information requested. Using a rubber band, wrap the completed culture transmission form around the aluminum container. Place the aluminum container into the smaller cardboard cylinder (provided). Place the specimen in the refrigerator until transported. When ready for transport, insert the smaller cylinder into the larger outer mailing tube **with the ice pack** for transportation. Specimens collected on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday may be shipped to the SLI via U.S. Mail. If a specimen is collected Thursday or Friday, contact an Immunization Epidemiologist at 617-983-6800 so arrangements can be made to pick up the specimen. If testing for RSV is included, use a same day courier to optimize isolation of the virus.

Testing results: A written culture report on each specimen submitted will be sent to the submitting health care provider once testing for the suspected viruses are completed.

Please **clearly indicate** on the Specimen Submission Form, under “Test requested” (box #5), which virus(es) you wish to test for. If you wish to test for Para-Influenza, RSV, Adenovirus and Influenza, please write “Respiratory panel” in box #5.

For additional information, please contact the Massachusetts Immunization Program at (617) 983-6800.